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The Culture and Education District

A scoping review for the Arts and Humanities Research Council

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Contents

- 1. Introduction.....4
- 2. Methodology5
- 3. The CED as a cultural cluster in the making7
 - 3.1. Context for the development..... 7
 - 3.2. Governance structures and management 8
 - 3.3. Evidence of emerging impacts..... 9
- 4. Recommendations for future research10
 - 4.1. Understanding the object of study 10
 - 4.2. Framing a programme of research 11
 - 4.3. Preparing the ground 12
 - 4.4. Setting the research agenda..... 12
- 5. References14

Appendices

- A. Literature Review
- B. Economic Work Strand
- C. Creative Work Strand
- D. Social Work Strand
- E. Symbolic and Governance Work Strand

List of acronyms

AHRC Arts and Humanities Research Council

CED Culture and Education District

CPO Compulsory Purchase Orders

ICC Institute of Cultural Capital

LBTH London Borough of Tower Hamlets

LCF London College of Fashion

LDA London Development Agency

LLDC London Legacy Development Corporation

QEOP Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

UCL University College London

UAL University of the Arts London

V&A Victoria and Albert museum

WWC What Works Centre

1. Introduction

This scoping report assesses the value of the Culture and Education District (CED) in London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) as a case study of 'creative clustering' in the making. Commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the main aim of the report is to lay the foundation for a large open call on research into the multiple impacts of the CED, based on ten months of expert observation and analysis by a multidisciplinary research team led by Dr Beatriz Garcia (Institute of Cultural Capital).

Although there have been various changes to the CED partnership, the latest plans indicate that the project will consist of four core developments on the site formerly used for hosting the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. These developments are taking place over two separate sites: 1) University College London (UCL) East (a campus for 10,000 students that will include a design school with a focus on engineering and cutting-edge biotech); and 2) the Stratford Waterfront, comprising: V&A East (a museum and exhibition venue), Sadler's Wells Dance Theatre (a 500-seat dance theatre), and University of the Arts London (UAL) campus (a development to bring together the university's six fashion colleges onto one major site).

Collectively, these developments are presented as the basis for a new creative cluster that will have long-lasting transformative effects on the East End of London and thus deliver on many of the legacy promises of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic programme. In terms of quantifiable economic benefits, the latest projections for the CED suggest, for example, that the project will create 3,000 jobs, attract 1.5 million visitors a year and deliver a £2.8bn boost to the economy of Stratford and the surrounding areas (Evans, 2016). More broadly, the project aims to create a cultural nexus connecting the sporting and leisure facilities of QEOP with the communities of Stratford, the already existing creative clusters of Hackney Wick and Fish Island, and a range of other cultural and creative organisations in the surrounding area.¹

In this scoping study, we evaluate the governance processes supporting the CED and assess early evidence of its impact in relation to four distinct areas: the 'economic', the 'creative', the 'social' and the 'symbolic'.² Based on these findings, we consider the value of the CED and its governance model as a reference point for future culture-led regeneration initiatives and mega-event legacy programmes, and offer recommendations and guidance for future research agendas around 'creative clusters'.

¹ For a detailed delivery plan outlining the aims, objectives and plans for collaborative working between CED partners, see Appendix F.

² See Appendices B to E for full reports from each of these work strands.

2. Methodology

The main aim of this scoping review is to provide insight into how best to study the CED and comparable 'cluster' developments. To achieve this aim, a multidisciplinary team was assembled that incorporated perspectives from economics, geography, sociology, anthropology and communications studies. Discrete work strands were devised to cover the governance processes of the CED and four distinct yet interrelated areas of potential impact. Under the overall direction of Dr Beatriz Garcia, these work strands were subsequently assigned to the following experts in the respective strand themes.

- Economic impacts – Dr Max Nathan (What Works Centre)
- Creative impacts – Professor Andy Pratt (City University)
- Social impacts – Professor Darren Smith and Professor Eleonora Belfiore (Loughborough University)
- Symbolic impacts – Dr Beatriz Garcia (Institute of Cultural Capital)
- Governance – Dr Beatriz Garcia (Institute of Cultural Capital).

In accordance with the model developed by Dr Garcia for Impacts 08 (Garcia et al., 2010) and the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad evaluation (Garcia et al., 2013), the methodologies, data gathering and analysis of findings for each of the above work strands were coordinated to ensure a holistic approach to reporting – with the 'symbolic impacts' and 'governance' strands cutting across all themes and thus key to our final recommendations.



The leaders of the respective strands were encouraged to use methodological approaches deemed most appropriate to their thematic area and most capable of achieving the overall aim of the scoping review. Each of these strands has resulted in a dedicated report, presented as a separate Appendix.

- In the case of the ‘economic impacts’ work strand, this entailed an approach based heavily on the review of literature and secondary data. (Appendix B)
- For the ‘creative impacts’ strand, economic auditing and mapping of the CED was supplemented with fieldwork with local firms and institution-level interviews, in an approach designed to explore knowledge flows and interactions both *within* the cluster and *between* the cluster and adjacent creative industries. (Appendix C)
- Based on fieldwork with social groups ‘on the margins’ of the CED, the ‘social impacts’ strand explored perceptions of inclusion and exclusion; feelings of belonging, attachment and disconnection; and the appropriation of space by different groups within the district. (Appendix D)
- The ‘governance’ strand used official documentary review and interviews with CED and London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) stakeholders to understand the structure of the partnership and the ‘official’ narrative that partners wished to project (Appendix E)
- Finally, the ‘symbolic impacts’ strand used online and press content analysis to contrast official (stakeholder) narratives with the dominant external (media) narratives about the CED as a new urban cluster (as above, Appendix E)

Consultation with CED partners was also incorporated into the research design, to allow partners to shape the aims and objectives of the scoping study, at the outset, and to respond and react to findings at the conclusion of the review.

3. The CED as a cultural cluster in the making

3.1. Context for the development

Over the last 30 years, there has been a steady growth in large-scale urban regeneration projects – ‘mega-projects’ that seek the wholesale redevelopment of entire city districts. In parallel to this trend, there has been a significant upsurge in the use of culture and creativity as a theme, focus, catalyst or impetus for urban regeneration – including the use of one-off mega-events (such as the Olympics) and iconic arts venues (such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao) as ‘kick-starters’ for wider regeneration processes. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the relationship between culture / creativity and regeneration was mostly conceived in terms of cultural consumption and tourism. However, over the last decade, cultural production has increasingly been recognised as a viable foundation for regeneration in its own right – with the ‘clustering’ of creative, cultural and educational sites representing one of the more popular strategies for supporting processes of cultural production.

The increasing emphasis placed on mega-projects (and creative clusters, in particular) as tools for urban regeneration highlights the pressing need for robust and holistic research into both the opportunities and the risks that these projects present – including, for instance, those of community exclusion and gentrification. As a major urban regeneration project led by cultural and educational institutions, the CED arguably provides an ideal opportunity to examine these opportunities and risks, and indeed to interrogate the notion of creative clustering itself – particularly given that this new initiative is currently at its very inception.

Prior to the London 2012 Olympic Games, the area chosen for the Olympic site had been an area marked by physical dereliction and high levels of social deprivation, but it had also become a growing ‘artistic agglomeration’ from the late 1960s onwards. The latter was due in large part to the ready availability of cheap work-space (Green, 1999).³ The construction of the Olympic Park led to the relocation of these creative businesses to the surrounding creative hubs of Hackney Wick and Fish Island (Davis, 2009). Whilst not part of the original Olympic legacy vision, the CED was conceived in response to criticisms that the QEOP lacked a cultural and civic centre that complemented and balanced the large Westfield shopping centre built along the Stratford aspect of the park. In this new context, partners anticipated a range of benefits from involvement in the CED, stemming, for example, from the co-location of other partners and existing creative communities – and thus, from the enhanced potential for collaboration and partnership working. This expectation presents a point of departure for the current scoping report.

³ For a more detailed summary of the site’s history, see Appendix C.

3.2. Governance structures and management

Our interviews, analysis of policy documents and historical visioning for the development suggest a number of issues with the management of the CED and the governance processes supporting it – some more serious and entrenched than others. Perhaps most fundamental of these issues are ones observed specifically with respect to the governance structure themselves, which were criticised by some partners both for their lack of leadership capacity and for what was perceived to be the insufficient regard given to partner input relative to that of the LLDC. Consultation with partners revealed tensions with the LLDC and a belief that, beyond a certain point, partners should be more invested than they currently are in pushing the project forward themselves – albeit with the assistance, ideally, of an LLDC appointed ‘cultural head’ whose remit would be to cultivate relationships between partners, local communities and existing creative industries.

These underlying issues with the governance structures for the CED are no doubt reflected, to some extent, in the difficulty experienced in forming and articulating a coherent shared vision for the site. The original ‘Olympicopolis’ narrative that helped to contextualise and galvanise initial support for the site has given way, over time, to a more fluid narrative that reflects the variable characteristics, needs and expectations of partners – a narrative which is enshrined in the shared delivery plan included in Appendix F. The perceived advantage of such an approach, for partners, has been that it acknowledges the diversity and the interdisciplinary of the partnership as a whole, as well as the unique offer of the respective partners. However, the absence of a single coherent narrative has arguably led, in turn, to difficulties in communicating the cluster. There is, for example, no formal or informal communications strategy and indeed no shared terminology more broadly – with doubts evident among partners as to whether or not it is worth them investing in a collective brand at all.

Given the number of partners involved in the project it is unsurprising that the project has been a complex undertaking – particularly given the variations that one would reasonably anticipate in terms of priorities, professional cultures and work practices. Moreover, the Olympic site was never to begin with a *tabula rasa* – meaning the partner organisations have had not only to function adequately as a collective but also to negotiate and relate capably with existing actors in the area.

3.3. Evidence of emerging impacts

The work strands undertaken as part of this scoping review paint a mixed picture in terms of the impacts of the Culture and Education District. On the one hand, it would appear not unreasonable to expect, based on a reading of the evidence of the effects of similar interventions, that the CED will in time have a net positive impact on the local economy of the area through, for example, the co-location of universities and local firms (and the knock-on effects of this, e.g., in terms of bringing research to market and providing skilled workers for local enterprises). However, any such expectation must necessarily be subject to a number of significant caveats (for a more detailed discussion of which, see Appendix B). In short, not all cultural interventions – or indeed economic area-based initiatives more generally – have a positive economic impact; and among those that do, the observable effects may be modest and in part attributable to gentrification and the displacement of existing communities. So far as the potential ‘creative impact’ of the CED is concerned (see Appendix C), there appears, furthermore, to be much work yet to be done in building constructive relationships with local creatives and ensuring that both CED partners and the pre-existing artistic communities around the CED are able to benefit from the new developments. Similarly, in terms of ‘social impact’ (see Appendix D), there appear to be concerns among some groups, locally, that the putative benefits of the development, such as improvements to the physical fabric and cultural infrastructure of the area, may be offset by processes of the studentification or gentrification that lead consequently to their marginalisation or exclusion from the area. Findings from the ‘symbolic impacts’ work strand, meanwhile, show that despite the significant amount of work already being conducted between partners, there is relatively little media coverage of the district as a collective entity, and thus minimal brand presence – with most reporting instead continuing to use the ‘Olympicopolis’ label coined during Boris Johnson’s tenure as Mayor. Collectively, these findings will be a cause for concern for partners given their stated ambition to engage with existing communities and industries in the area; and indeed to distance themselves from forms of redevelopment that leave communities behind.

4. Recommendations for future research

As mentioned already, the main aim of this scoping review is to lay the foundation for a large open call by the AHRC into the multiple impacts of the site, by considering which aspects of the CED should be regarded as priorities for future research and by offering advice on how such research might be approached most successfully. In this section, we therefore present a series of recommendations for future research in this area, drawing on the more detailed findings published with respect to each work strand that can be explored in Appendices X-X. Some of these recommendations are specific to the CED. However, others will be of relevance to research on creative clusters more broadly.

4.1. Understanding the object of study

The most urgent prerequisite to any call for broader research on the CED is greater clarity on how the notion of creative clustering is itself understood. At present, the term ‘cluster’ is used by policy-makers and stakeholders in manifold and ambiguous ways – with other terms, such as ‘hub’, ‘quarter’ and ‘district’, often used interchangeably. As Wood and Dovey (2015, p. 54) argue, however, these terms have distinct associations, with ‘cluster’ (‘a socio-spatial assemblage of people, buildings and activities’) preferable to ‘quarter’ or ‘district’ when seeking to describe or understand the relationships and connections between organisations rather than simply their co-location.

Secondary – but related – to this is the need, from the outset, to understand the nature of the CED as a unique example of creative clustering. As a ‘mega project’, the CED cannot be conceived as a singular entity but rather as a complex and ever-changing ecosystem of *different* projects and partners that are united by colocation and a loose common set of objectives. However, these common objectives have the potential to evolve over time; and projects and partners will each, furthermore, have their own dynamics, timescales and governance structures, which individually will have the potential to facilitate, frustrate or even alter these shared aims. Feedback from CED partners attests to a ‘morphology’ which is both inscrutable and constantly shifting, with many commenting not only on the range of partner activity, but also the speed with which plans could change, and the ‘disconnect’, in some respects, between the structures of governance and finance that define the CED at a governmental and policy level and the expansive and ‘messy’ relationships between partners and other organisations ‘on the ground’.

4.2. Framing a programme of research

Any future programme of research on the multiple impacts of the CED must necessarily be grounded on a sound understanding of the nature of the cluster and how this precludes particular research methods and approaches whilst making others *prima facie* more desirable. Conventional impact evaluation methodologies are very often static – devising a single set of outcomes, indicators or targets that can then be isolated and tracked. This kind of approach is well suited to closed systems where the object of evaluation is fixed and stable. However, where the object of evaluation is constantly evolving, evaluation requires considerable ingenuity and to consider impact through multiple interrelated dimensions. As such, the most appropriate approach to assessing the value and impact of the CED as an exemplar of creative clustering is not classic evaluation, but an open-ended combination of collaborative research programmes that incorporate multiple approaches that have the capacity to evolve and adapt over time.

In contrast to the traditional focus of evaluation on outputs and outcomes, it was also agreed with partners that future research on the CED would benefit from a complementary focus on the processes involved in partnership working – for instance, through the use, where appropriate, of embedded researchers. Of course, in order to account both for the dynamic nature of the CED and the desire to evaluate processes rather than just outcomes, it will be imperative for any future research on the site to incorporate a longitudinal focus. As argued extensively by Garcia (2004, 2010, 2016), there is a strong case, in general, for the ‘long duree’ of social and cultural development. However, this is particularly important in the case of a mega-project such as the CED, where the sheer size of the undertaking, the enormous range of actors involved and the long time frame anticipated for some impacts, suggests that research will need to span not months or even years but potentially decades if it is to adequately capture the evolution and impact of the site.

Arts and humanities scholars are uniquely placed to engage with this kind of research. As has been argued for the last ten to twenty years, narrow economic value arguments and evaluations only capture part of the success of clusters such as the CED (and indeed wider culture-led regeneration interventions) – fundamentally because ‘success’ and ‘failure’ mean different things to various partners, and changes at different times. The value of an arts and humanities lens is that it seeks to understand and value this multiplicity of (potentially conflicting) views, rather than reducing them to a singular position.

4.3. Preparing the ground

Various steps can be taken by partners to facilitate and support a future programme of research – with these steps mostly relating to data collection, recording and sharing. Although partners emphasised the limited resources they each have to collect monitoring data and conduct routine surveys, any data of this nature that they are able to collect will clearly be a crucial source of evidence to future research. (Specific tools could include, for example, the shared longitudinal student outcome survey mooted by partners, which would record and observe the impact of the CED's wider learning environment as students make their way in the world after their studies.) Ideally, these data collection efforts should be complemented by a common way of recording, archiving and communicating projects that have emerged from partnership working related to the CED. Research methodologies involving embedded researchers in multiple partner organisations would support these efforts.

4.4. Setting the research agenda

Each thematic area considered by this scoping review carries with it a raft of more specific recommendations for future research, which can be reviewed in greater detail in the dedicated work strand reports (see Appendices C-E). These dedicated reports suggest a number of potential foci for future research. In common with some of the other work strand reports, the creative impacts report, for example, suggests that future research in this area concerns itself not just with outcomes but also, crucially, with knowledge exchange processes themselves. The social impacts work strand report, for its part, recommends a wider lens of enquiry than previous studies of culture-led regeneration in this area, such that it is possible to capture more fully the voices and interpretations of both mainstream and more marginal social groups. The report for the symbolic and governance work strands suggests, meanwhile, that future research would benefit from a focus on the relationship between CED partners and surrounding actors (such as local authorities and other creative clusters), as well as the relationship between CED partners, in practice, and how this contrasts with the relationship between partners, in principle, as delimited by governance and financing structures.

Various methodologies are identified by the work strand reports as best suited to tackling these potential research foci – with many of the reports extolling the benefits of more experimental, descriptive and creatively engaged research methods. In addition to more conventional quantitative methods, the economic impacts work strand report, for example, recommends process evaluations using qualitative methods as a key complement to any work in this domain; whilst the governance and symbolic impacts report suggests the use of evocative and arts-based methodologies to better capture the 'buzz' created by clustering processes.

Each work strand report also helpfully identifies the potential challenges and risks that future research might encounter. With respect to research on economic impact, the authors of the

dedicated work strand report caution, for example, that, despite the potential for a range of positive economic outcomes from the CED, researchers must nonetheless remain vigilant to the possibility that not all local residents and firms will benefit – and that some, indeed, may actively lose out. The social impact work strand report, by contrast, highlights the difficulties that may be encountered in looking to engage research participants from marginalised groups.

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